Political Parties and Innovation: Critical Insights

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Comments welcome

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Introduction

The present text is written at the crossroads of various social science disciplines: organization science, management, business economics, communication research, and political science. Over the years, scholars at home in these various disciplines have researched the innovative behavior of individuals, individuals in organizational settings, and entire social systems – be they manufacturing or service companies, profit or non-profit organizations – creating a considerable body of research that is frequently referred to as innovation research. Just as any other branch of inquiry in the social sciences, innovation research has its own particular conventions, standard operating procedures, and visions. This paper is an attempt to critically assess the realm of innovation research in light of its potential contribution to the study of innovation processes in political parties.

Multiple reasons motivate such an exercise. First of all, innovation research has generated numerous observations that are relevant for students of party politics striving towards an enhanced understanding of the ebbs and flows of parties. Second and related, the paper represents a conscious attempt at bridging the unfortunate academic divide that exists between students of parties and scholars researching organizational settings in the disciplines of organization science, management, and business economics. Indeed, the lack of cross-fertilization between these disciplines and party politics has often been lamented, yet only rarely acted upon. Thirdly and prescriptively, a careful consideration of the findings of innovation research will provide the analyzer of innovation dynamics in parties with an analytical, conceptual, and possibly theoretical scaffolding for his/her own research – this in the hope that valuable resources and time won’t be wasted pondering matters that innovation studies have long proven to be beyond the pale.

The survey of innovation research serves as a basis for section II in which I examine programmatic innovation in political parties. The goal is a theory of programmatic innovation that incorporates both micro and macro levels of analysis. I discuss programmatic innovation in light of the question "Who does what, how, when, and why?". A logical explanation for the incidence of programmatic innovation is given at both micro and macro levels and a discussion of programmatic innovation in relation to selected models of voting behavior follows. I propose a process view of programmatic innovation that allows the “black box” of internal party processes to be opened. The paper ends with an exploration of various predictor variables of programmatic innovation.

Those unfamiliar with the disciplines of organization science, management, and business economics may be unaccustomed with certain concepts that feature in this essay. In an attempt to avoid misunderstandings, I have, where I thought it necessary, inserted in the main body of the text between brackets a brief explanation of certain terms. This may interfere with the overall readability of the paper for which I offer my apologies.

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1 This paper was written while I was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Political Science, University of Oslo. I thank faculty as well as staff for the congenial work environment. Special thanks to Knut Heidar for making possible my research stay and to Jo Saglie and Hanne Marthe Narud for stimulating conversations about Norwegian politics – the usual disclaimer applies.

2 This is the American term, better known in Europe as organization theory or organization sociology.


Exploring the Realm of Innovation Research

This is not the place for a comprehensive review of the innovation research literature. Instead, I have chosen to use broad brush strokes and focus on those issues I felt could be of interest to students of party politics. For the sake of clarity in presentation, I have organized the survey of innovation research via separate headings, i.e. research perspectives on innovation, innovation defined, and explanatory variables in innovation research. Although this makes me guilty of cutting up a vast body of research into artificial slices, I considered it the best way to give the reader unacquainted with innovation research a taste of the innovation “pudding”. That said, the review mainly treats innovation outside the province of political science, i.e. such as it appears in organization science, management, business economics, and communication research. Political science too has had some interesting things to say on the topic of innovation, yet this is kept as a prelude to section two.

Research Perspectives on Innovation

It should come as no surprise that every social science discipline has its own particular research agenda as well as analytical toolbox when it comes to the study of innovations. For example, rural sociologists interested in innovation attempt to flesh out how novel agricultural equipment and practices spread throughout a farming population. Business economics and management, on the other hand, are concerned with how firms may optimize production by adopting technical innovations or how receptive a firm’s internal climate is to the introduction of new administrative procedures. Organization scientists with a research interest in education may investigate what makes certain schools and institutions of higher education like universities accept new teaching programs more readily than others.

Nonetheless, the various disciplinary research orientations exhibit a certain commonality in loci of inquiry. At root, all of them are concerned with the newness of a particular idea, artifact, or product and the dynamics produced by the new object. With this commonality in mind, let us explore the different research perspectives on innovation.

Authors working within the innovation tradition have made distinctions between the study of the “diffusion” and “adoption” of innovations. Diffusion researchers are preoccupied with understanding why and how an innovation – or several innovations – spread throughout a population of similar entities. The earlier mentioned example of innovation research in rural sociology is a case in point: how does, for instance, a new type of corn diffuse among a population of farmers in a geographically delineated area? Other standard diffusion research is done in the sociology of health: how does new medical equipment like scanners or novel vaccines circulate in a population consisting of hospitals and/or private practitioners? But also in communication research and business economics, the diffusion of innovations constitutes a popular academic dwelling spot.

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7 This in stark contrast with party politics: few analyses of party seem to be inspired by a diffusion perspective. Closest come Robert Harmel & Lars Svåsand (1997) ‘The Influence of New Parties on Old Parties’ Platforms’, *Party Politics*, 3: 315-40. They investigate how under certain performance conditions new parties can have an impact on the manifestoes of established parties – i.e. the diffusion of political issues in the party population. But also in regard party organization, a diffusion angle could stimulate novel research. Thus, the debate on the types of party (cadre, mass membership, catch-all, cartel) could be approached by investigating the exact diffusion in the party population over time of the characteristic variables associated with the various types of party.
Particular attention is paid to the alternative time-space trajectories of innovations: does the diffusion of innovations follow a 'S'-shaped curve with a slow start, a take-off, and finally a plateauing? is there, instead, a hierarchy effect at work which makes those at home in higher echelons trigger the innovation after which its use cascades downward to those in the lower echelons? is there a neighborhood/proximity effect in operation by which the innovation diffuses over the shortest distance, following already existing communication networks? or is a combination or contingent application of these models closer to the truth?

The all time classic on the diffusion of innovations is Everett M. Rogers' aptly titled *Diffusion of Innovations* and the interested reader is referred to this work for further information. The remainder of this review is concerned with the adoption of innovations.

The adoption perspective sets itself two tasks: (1) untangle what makes certain entities adopt more innovations than others and/or (2) determine how an innovation can be traced in organizations over time. The first line of inquiry is characteristic for the early innovation studies, often dubbed organizational innovativeness investigations, whereas the second emerged in the 1970s representing a different line of research. Although both types of research generated a plethora of studies, their findings have been less than consistent. Thus, George W. Downs & Lawrence B. Mohr in a critical appraisal of the innovation literature call the field beyond interpretation because of its extreme variation in empirical results. Similarly, John R. Kimberly exposes the contradictory harvest of innovation research, whereas Alan D. Meyer & James B. Goes question the outpouring of empirical research vis-à-vis its few unequivocal findings.

The critics are, by and large, right in their negative evaluation of "old" innovation research. However, more contemporary studies avoid most of the early imperfections through an optimal research design. Let us explore some of these matters in more depth.

Innovation research in the adoption tradition started off by examining the innovative behavior of individuals, and this strand of inquiry set the stage for investigations into the innovativeness of organizations. Many if not all of these early organizational innovativeness studies were oversimplifications in that the data were acquired from a single individual, usually the chief decision maker of the organization. Not only was the organization hereby reduced to the equivalent of a single individual, the entire organization was regarded as a single unit, without consideration for the dynamics of its sub-unit participants.

Of prime concern to researchers examining the innovativeness of organizations is the determination of the variables related to more innovative and less innovative organizations. Often assessed relationships are the ones between structural characteristics of the organization and innovativeness or organizational size and innovativeness. It is the instability in the results of these studies that prompted the critics to question the field of innovation research.

Another problem of organizational innovativeness studies was the so-called "pro-innovation bias". What this means, is that innovation was regarded in positive terms socially. Thus, early researchers operated under a normative preconception that attributed ex ante positive effects to innovation: innovation was seen as good and individuals or systems

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9 Questions that are relevant for party politics too – see footnote 7.
15 A survey of these and other independent variables is undertaken in the section "Explanatory Variables in Innovation Research".
that failed to innovate were seen, if not as bad, than at least as suspect. Particularly, a research set-up in which the dependent variable was operationalized as an (aggregate) innovation score - the number of innovations adopted or the time of first adoption - increased the danger of a pro-innovation orientation. 17

A remedy for some of these imperfections was closely bound up with the shift from variable to process oriented research. Most if not all of the early organizational innovativeness studies belong to the methodological category of variance research: a type of data gathering and analysis that consists mainly of determining the co-variances among a set of variables. 18 Process research, on the other hand, provides the source of inspiration for those tracing innovations in organizations. Of interest to process researchers is the particular time ordered sequence of a set of events as it unfolds within organizational settings.

Process research brought to light the various stages in the innovation process and some scholars deserve special mention in this respect. James Q. Wilson is among the first to discuss the different phases of innovation. He proposes a threefold categorization beginning with the conception of change over the proposing of change to the adoption and implementation of change. 19 In similar vein, Gerald Zaltman and his colleagues break the innovation process down to an initiation stage and an implementation stage. 20 The initiation stage, in turn, is divided into three sub-stages: knowledge awareness, formation of attitudes toward the innovation, and decision. The implementation phase involves initial implementation and continued-sustained implementation. John R. Kimberly, finally, adopts a life cycle perspective of innovations, differentiating between adoption, utilization, and exnovation as the main stages. 21 Others have followed in the wake of these scholars proposing similar conceptualizations of the process of innovation. 22

The contribution of process research to the study of innovation is twofold. First, it underscores the critical importance of implementation/utilization versus adoption: once adopted, an innovation may be more or less widely used in the organization. 23 Louis G. Tornatzky & Katherine J. Klein note in this respect: "[...] a focus on an adoption decision as a dependent variable ignores the fact of post-adoption variability in implementation." 24 Second, it reveals how predictor variables may relate differently to the various phases of the innovation process. As Gerald Zaltman et al. observe: "[...] different configurations of organizational structure facilitate the innovation process in its different stages." 25

Contemporary innovation researchers still employ a process view of innovation, yet they have moved from an explicit stage-by-stage conception of the innovation process to a

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17 The operationalization of the dependent variable has provoked considerable debate. Alan D. Meyer & James B. Goes (1988): 900 note in this respect: "Researchers who construct innovativeness scores by adding nominally measured adoptions remove specific innovations from their social contexts, ignore pre- and post-adoption events, and raise the level of analysis in ways that are rarely acknowledged. They measure an aggregate construct – adopting lots of different innovations. But when the utilization of specific innovations is not assessed, their ultimate effects are obscured.” Similar points are raised by George W. Downs Jr. & Lawrence B. Mohr (1976).


more dynamic and continuous conception. The stages are no longer conceived as discrete markers; instead the organization (vis-à-vis the innovation) may move back and forth between the phases. In addition, there is a tendency for the decisions involved in the innovation(s) to become the units of analysis, whereby the “assimilation of each innovation [is seen] as the unfolding of a unique series of choices, attracting different participants, triggering different processes, and subject to shifting incentives and constraints.” The shift in orientation toward organizational participants and their actions and decisions, is part of an attempt to craft a consistent theory of innovation that links the micro and macro levels of analysis.

The purposive actions and ambitions of individuals form the foundation of a macro theory of organizational innovation whereby individual and organization interact to create a context either conducive or hostile to innovation, with time as the key historical metric.

**Innovation defined**

A plethora of definitions surface when browsing the innovation literature. Yet there seems to exist a scholarly consensus that innovation entails the adoption of a new idea, practice, or material artifact by an organization. This understanding sets the activity of innovation apart from organizational change. Change refers to alteration in the structure and functioning of an organization. All innovations then signal change. Yet, not all change implies innovations since not everything the organization adopts is new. Kenneth E. Knight however is more reluctant to see significant differences between the process of innovation and change where he notes: “[...] innovation is considered as a special case of the process of change in an organization. The two differ only in the novelty of the outcome.”

Innovation is distinct from invention too. Lawrence B. Mohr notes: “Invention implies bringing something new into being; innovation implies bringing something new into use.” Mohr underscores here that innovation is indissolubly linked with the utilization/implementation of a new idea or product, not just with its conception. One may add to this that the act of invention usually involves one person – the inventor – while successful innovation requires the pooling of many resources, both human and material, and thus implies group activity and coordination.

Let us after this brief conceptual digression consider some popular definitions of innovation. Selwyn W. Becker & Thomas L. Whisler define innovation as “the first or early use of an idea by one of a set of organizations with similar goals.” The emphasis here is on how new the idea is compared to the environment of the adopting unit, with special reference to the time of first adoption. Thus, to be the first, to be the leader is the distinguishing trait of the innovative organization. An environmental point of reference is present too in the work of...

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29 This in contrast with the earlier critics proclaiming the impossibility of a theory of innovation. Consider, for example, Richard R. Nelson & Douglas Yates (1978): ix where they point out that their aim is not to offer a general theory of innovation because “there is an implicit view that we know too little about the functioning and redirection of public organizations to permit large-scale generalizations and that, by implication, attempts to do so lead all too often to empty exercises in conceptual gymnastics.” The failure to arrive at a theory of innovation is, it seems, closely related to an emphasis upon structural variables and a neglect for the individual and his/her ambitions, motivations, and actions. Thereby, theory critical innovation researchers have forgotten many of James Q. Wilson’s (1966) suggestions for a theory of innovation, i.e. the economic focus upon incentive systems.
33 Lawrence B. Mohr (1969): 112.
34 See also Gerald Zaltman et al. (1973); John R. Kimberly (1981); Walter R. Nord & Sharon Tucker (1987).
35 Selwyn W. Becker & Thomas L. Whisler (1967): 463.
scholars who extract newness from the relationship between the product and the state of the art in the field from which it originates. Only those products that differ substantially from previous products then deserve the label innovations.

Kenneth E. Knight suggests defining an innovation as “the adoption of a change which is new to an organization and to the relevant environment.” Both adopting unit and environment then provide the background against which the newness of the change is to be ascertained. Note that the term “environment” in Knight’s definition is restricted to the direct reference group of the innovator, i.e. competitors, customers, and suppliers. Lawrence B. Mohr follows in Knight’s wake by defining an innovation as “the successful introduction into an applied situation of means or ends that are new to that situation.”

Most research, however, defines innovation in primary reference to the adopting unit. Something is considered an innovation when it is new to the organization that adopts it. This means that organizational activities like borrowing and imitation qualify as innovation generators, making newness or innovativeness relative organizational concepts.

Special mention deserves the definition of Gerald Zaltman et al. which underscores the subjective nature of innovation: an innovation is “any idea, practice, or material artifact perceived to be new by the relevant unit of adoption.” Their definition is important in that it creates a direct link between innovation and real life organizational situations like resistance to innovation and intra-organizational conflict. John R. Kimberly, however, objects to the above definition on the grounds that “perception of newness by organizational members are [...] factors which influence receptivity rather than criteria for determining whether something is an innovation.”

Explanatory Variables in Innovation Research

“Innovation appears to be not a single variable but an attenuated process in which a number of critical variables are likely operating.” It is these critical variables I will now survey.

Innovation research has employed four main explanatory variables to account for the incidence of innovation. They are individual characteristics, organizational characteristics, attributes of innovations, and environmental conditions.

**Individual characteristics** refer to the attitudinal, motivational, and value traits of organizational participants as they relate to the act of innovation. Jerald Hage & Robert Dewar, 36

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38 Lawrence B. Mohr (1969): 112.
41 As Walter R. Nord and Sharon Tucker (1987): 5 observe: “Something that is new to members of one system or subsystem often is not new to others. The metal axe, for example, could still be new to some primitive cultures.”
42 Gerald Zaltman et al. (1973): 10.
44 Selwyn W. Becker & Thomas L. Whisler (1967): 469.
45 Take note that this review of explanatory variables is abridged. I refer the reader to Richard L. Daft (1982) and Fariborz Damanpour (1991) for a comprehensive discussion of independent variables as they feature in innovation research.
for instance, stress the importance of value orientations in interpreting innovation. Their study shows that positive value orientations toward innovation are crucial explanatory determinants. Particularly the values of the elite (i.e. dominant coalition) as compared to the values of the entire membership or executive leadership (i.e. one person) are found to be good predictors of innovation. Similarly, Howard B. Kaplan notes that the professionalism, leadership style, and cosmopolitanism of administrators are positively associated with organizational innovation. Lawrence B. Mohr likewise points out that attitudes favorable to change play an important role in predicting innovation.

Approaching the theme of innovation from a motivational premise, James G. March & Herbert A. Simon indicate how search behavior for solutions is instigated by members’ job dissatisfaction. Richard M. Cyert & James G. March, in turn, describe how the perception of organizational performance by participants may spur innovation. On the basis of an organization’s performance, they identify two kinds of innovation: slack innovation and distress innovation. The latter is rooted in failure and the organization’s attempt to search for a solution; the former develops from success and the organizational slack that follows in its wake. Anthony Downs in his study of bureaus depicts similar processes of performance gaps leading to innovation via search activities. Michelle Kremen Bolton, however, finds the relationship between substandard performance and innovation to be more complex than suggested by Cyert & March and Downs. She takes note of certain institutionalization effects that decrease the risk and uncertainty attached to innovations, thereby reducing the overall explanatory leverage of substandard performance.

**Organizational characteristics** and their relationship with innovation have featured extensively in innovation research and, occasionally, some studies assign primary predictive powers to organizational attributes – this often motivated by a fear of psychological reductionism in conjunction with a Durkheimian research methodology. Victor A. Thompson, for instance, regards organizational structure as the main determinant of innovation in bureaucracies. Similarly, Jerald Hage & Michael Aiken conclude that the rate of organizational change is better explained by organizational properties than with measures of attitudes of organizational members toward change. Linsu Kim in a study of innovations in manufacturing organizations in developing countries too is supportive of Hage & Aiken’s conclusions: organizational innovation is positively related to professional training and activity, and integration (i.e. the degree to which the workings of sub-units are integrated to attain the common goal of the organization), and inversely related to job codification (i.e. the degree to which formal rules motivate who is to do what) and hierarchy of authority.

Tom Burns & G. M. Stalker in a study of Scottish electronics organizations approach the relationship between organizational characteristics and innovation in a different manner. Based on environmental conditions (whether or not the surrounding realities are fairly stable...
and certain) they identify two types of organization structure: mechanistic and organic. The former is, among others, characterized by vertical communication, hierarchical control, formal leadership and centralization of decision making, and specialized work divisions. Organic structures capture the opposite organizational attributes like flexibility, decentralization, and an absence of rigid bureaucratic structures. Burns & Stalker indicate that the organic model is typically associated with change, and therefore perhaps a better organizational arrangement for innovation, whereas mechanistic structures tend to inhibit innovations. Michael Aiken & Jerald Hage too find that certain organic traits facilitate innovation. 58 Particularly high involvement of low level participants and a high level of lateral communications are strongly related to the degree of innovation. Moreover, innovative organizations tend to have a history of innovation which encourages continued innovative behavior. Frank Hull & Jerald Hage also draw attention to how type of organization as an independent variable may affect innovation. 59 In particular, they point out the disparity in the relationship between innovation and large scale versus small scale work and complex versus non-complex work. Fariborz Damanpour, finally, underlines that innovation implies different things for manufacturing and service organizations, and profit and non-profit organizations. 60

The advent of process inspired innovation research changes the conceptualization of the relationship between organizational characteristics and innovation dramatically. The stage view of innovation accentuates how organizational variables (as well as other explanatory variables) relate differently to the different phases of the innovation process. Gerald Zaltman and his colleagues’ model specifies:

" [...] in stimulating the initiation of innovations, a higher degree of complexity, lower formalization, and lower centralization facilitate the gathering and processing of information, which is crucial to the initiation stage. [...] in the implementation stage a higher level of formalization and centralization and a lower level of complexity are likely to reduce role conflict and ambiguity, which could impair implementation."

Jon L. Pierce & André L. Delbecq find similar relationships between structural variables like differentiation (i.e. heterogeneity in occupational types), formalization, and decentralization of decision making vis-à-vis innovation as conceptualized in several stages. 62 Robert Duncan, finally, goes as far as proposing an ambidextrous model of organizational design in which organizations must learn to incorporate simultaneously those structures that are appropriate for the initiation and implementation stages of the innovation process. 63

A frequently explored relationship is the one between organizational size and innovation: the findings suggest that size promotes innovation. 64 However, Everett M. Rogers warns that in most studies size features as a surrogate measure incorporating several other variables that assist innovation, like organizational slack, technical expertise of employees, and organization structure in general. 65 Walter R. Nord & Sharon Tucker, in turn, caution that “it would be a serious mistake to assume that today innovation is exclusively or primarily the province of the large organizations that dominate the economy in so many other ways.” 66

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Innovation research concerning the influence of environmental characteristics on innovation has been sketchy. The economists Richard R. Nelson & Sidney G. Winter 67 and management theorists Peter Clark & Neil Staunton 68 note that market conditions may affect innovation. Gerald Zaltman et al. record in this respect that marketing factors are the major source of ideas for innovation. 69 Rosabeth Moss Kanter, in turn, maintains that “one important factor in the development, transfer, and diffusion of innovations is a receptive political, economic, social, and legal environment.” 70 In addition, she hypothesizes that the more dependent an organization is on other organizations, the more likely it will be shaped or constrained in its internal innovation by those surrounding segments that dominate it. Lawrence B. Mohr finds support for her first assertion: innovation is a negative function of obstacles stemming from the communities in which organizations are imbedded. 71 J. Victor Baldridge & Robert A. Burnham conclude that heterogeneous and changing environments are likely to cause problems for organizations that promote the adoption of innovations. 72 Jon L. Pierce & André L. Delbecq finally, contend that environmental uncertainty is positively related with the initiation, adoption, and implementation of innovations. 73

Attributes of innovations as they relate to the innovation process constitute a final group of predictors. Special heed is paid to the distinction between administrative and technical innovations, since they imply potentially different decision making processes. 74 Technical innovations pertain to products, services, and production process technology; they are related to the basic work activities of the organization. Administrative innovations, on the other hand, concern organizational structure and administrative processes and, as such, are indirectly related to the basic work activities of an organization. Of importance is that the adoption of technical and administrative innovations relate differently to predictor variables. This makes Richard L. Daft suggest a dual core model of organizational innovation in which low professionalism, high formalization, and high centralization aid administrative innovations, whereas the opposite conditions enhance the likelihood of technical innovations. 75 Fariborz Damanpour & William M. Evan in a study of innovation in public libraries find that the rate of adoption of technical innovations is higher than that of administrative innovations because the former are more observable, tend to have higher trialability (i.e. the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis), and are perceived as more advantageous than their administrative counterparts. 76

Another important innovation attribute is the radicalness of the innovation (i.e. the degree to which an innovation creates changes in the structure and functioning of the organization). Innovation researchers have employed several categories of innovation radicalness: Walter R. Nord & Sharon Tucker distinguish between routine and radical innovations 77; R. Normann separates variations from reorientations 78; Fariborz Damanpour 79 and John E. Ettlie et al. 80 single out incremental innovations from radical innovations.

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69 Gerald Zaltman et al. (1973).
75 Richard L. Daft (1982).
77 Walter R. Nord & Sharon Tucker (1967).
79 Fariborz Damanpour (1988).
Reorientations and radical innovations produce fundamental changes in the activities of an organization while routine innovations, variations, and incremental innovations result in little departure from existing practices.

Radical innovations, because they cause pervasive alterations in the roles, status, and behavior of organizational participants increase the likelihood of resistance and intra-organizational conflict, thereby thwarting implementation. 81 John Ettlie and his colleagues underline that different structures and strategies are necessary for radical and incremental innovations. 82 Radical innovations require aggressive technological policy and a concentration of specialists. Incremental innovations are more likely in large, complex, decentralized organizations that have market dominated growth strategies. The distinction between radical and incremental innovations is important, yet it should not obfuscate the fact that organizations need to adopt both types of innovations if they want to secure their continuing existence. 83

Michael K. Moch & Edward V. Morse distinguish between innovations that are compatible with the interests and perspectives of lower level personnel and those that are not. 84 They discover that attributes thought to characterize the generally innovative organization – large size, specialization, decentralization, and differentiation – do successfully predict the frequency of adoptions of innovations compatible with lower level interests. Less compatible innovations tend to be adopted by large and functionally differentiated organizations. Thus they conclude: "[...] different models appear to predict the adoption of different types of innovations." 85

Assessing the literature on innovation characteristics Louis G. Tornatzky & Katherine J. Klein find that three attributes have the most consistent significant relationship to innovation adoption: compatibility (of an innovation with existing practices and values), relative advantage (i.e. degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes), and complexity (i.e. degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use). 86 To this list of significant variables Everett M. Rogers adds trialability and observability (i.e. the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others). 87

**Political Parties and Programmatic Innovation**

In this section I will develop the foundations for a theory of programmatic innovation (PI). Administrative innovation, i.e. innovation as it relates to organizational and administrative processes in party, is not captured by these theoretical notes. In fact, innovation research suggests that different rationales and variables are in force for programmatic and administrative innovation. The focus on the programmatic dimension is motivated by an understanding of party that regards ideology and policy as the essential scholarly building blocks: it is ideology and policy that tie together the various elements of party and ground it in the electorate, legislature, and government. 88

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81 E.g.: Fariborz Damanpour (1988).
85 Idem: 723.
86 Louis G. Tornatzky & Katherine J. Klein (1982).
Critics of party may question an undertaking such as mine, claiming that “there is nothing new under the sun” – parties offer the same old wine, maybe occasionally in different bottles. My contention is that there are new things under the sun and the remainder of this paper offers theoretical support for this assertion. I will not present hard and fast empirics to support my claim, instead I will rely on logical argumentation. And the late Herbert Simon will serve as chief companion in this endeavor:

"[...] if we inspect almost any decision process in public organizations, in legislatures, or, for that matter, in the design departments and marketing departments of business firms, we find that the bulk of the effort is given over to dreaming up new solutions to problems, new programs, new policies, new products, and new ways of marketing. [...] Contrary to the views of the Preacher, there are indeed new things under the sun every day." 89

First, however, I present a selective overview of innovation research as it has featured in political science.

**Innovation in Political Science**

Innovation is not entirely *terra incognita* for the political scientist. Thus, Jack L. Walker in a stimulating paper investigates the adoption of eighty-eight programs (e.g. air pollution control, child labor standards, etc.) by states in the US. 90 He develops an innovation score and identifies several correlates of innovation, such as the size and wealth of states as well as political factors like the degree of party competition.

Often innovation is studied as part of the (governmental) policy process. Nelson W. Polsby, for example, asks the question "Where do new public policies come from?", and presents a more balanced and delicate picture of policy initiation as solely residing with Congress or the President. 91 Other examples in the policy stream of research include John Kingdon’s seminal *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* 92 and Paul Sabatier’s 93 and Frank R. Baumgartner & Bryan D. Jones 94 work on policy change. Frequently, innovation also features in agenda setting studies that trace the diffusion of (new) issues in the media, public, and policy agenda. 95

Innovation is regularly associated with "leadership" and "entrepreneurship" in political science. 96 Thus Jameson W. Doig & Erwin C. Hargrove and their collaborators make explicit non-neoclassical economics serves as a point of reference here – especially scholars like Joseph A. Schumpeter and the neo-Austrian school. For neoclassical economists the question of entrepreneurship is unproblematic: entrepreneurship is a variable dependent upon economic factors, such as the availability of capital, labor, technology, and access to markets. *Ipso facto*, entrepreneurial activity will emerge more or less spontaneously whenever conditions are favorable as an instance of rational profit maximization. Also management theorists explore the links between innovation and entrepreneurship. Consider, for example, Peter F. Drucker (1994 revised edition) *Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Practice and Principles*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann: 27 where he maintains:

"Entrepreneurs innovate. Innovation is the specific instrument of entrepreneurship.” Drucker is interesting in that he

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96 Non-neoclassical economics serves as a point of reference here – especially scholars like Joseph A. Schumpeter and the neo-Austrian school. For neoclassical economists the question of entrepreneurship is unproblematic: entrepreneurship is a variable dependent upon economic factors, such as the availability of capital, labor, technology, and access to markets. *Ipso facto*, entrepreneurial activity will emerge more or less spontaneously whenever conditions are favorable as an instance of rational profit maximization. Also management theorists explore the links between innovation and entrepreneurship. Consider, for example, Peter F. Drucker (1994 revised edition) *Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Practice and Principles*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann: 27 where he maintains:
the link between leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovation. 97 Via selected case studies they explore the various dimensions of entrepreneurship and factors (individual as well as external) that impact upon it. Highly stimulating too, in this respect, is a paper by Nancy C. Roberts in which she explores the link between entrepreneurs and innovation. 98 She defines public entrepreneurs as “individuals who generate, design, and implement innovative ideas in the public domain.” 99 In addition, she takes note of the phases of innovation and separates entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs like “policy intellectuals”, “policy advocates”, and “policy champions”.

It comes as a surprise, however, that on entering the particular scholarly mold of electoral politics, little systematic work is found on the dynamics of innovation. 100 And the studies that are available usually fail to appreciate and employ the full battery of perspectives and tools offered by the innovation template. A few examples:

Richard Gillespie & William E. Paterson present a study on the ideological renewal of European social democratic parties in recent times. They attribute an important role to electoral decline as providing the trigger for ideological change. However, no reference is made to the performance theories of Anthony Downs 102 or Richard M. Cyert & James G. March 103, which leads them to neglect electoral success as an impetus for programmatic change. 104 Secondly, the focus of Gillespie & Paterson is on ideology/programs of principle rather than platforms, making it of less direct interests for the study of party strategies. Moreover, the dependent variable is not clearly defined – what constitutes renewal? – and a firm micro grounding of their framework in the purposive behavior of participants is absent.

Herbert Kitschelt’s work on European socialist parties avoids some of these imperfections. 105 Adopting a contingency theory of choice in party organization, he ties environmental aspects and factors internal to the party together and distinguishes between two strategies for renewal: “innovation from above” and “innovation from below”. The former refers to leaders initiating the change, while in the latter case, the influx of new members provides the motor for programmatic alteration. Yet some problems maintain: first and foremost, no distinction is made between the initiation, adoption, and utilization of new issues by parties, i.e. the stage process of innovation. Secondly, the innovation strategy envisaged by Kitschelt is mainly reactionary, i.e. reacting to the new challenges of libertarian politics and

also stresses that entrepreneurship and innovation are not limited to the economic sphere; instead they pertain to all activities of human beings. These and related matters I discuss in “Reflections on Party Strategy, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation”.

99 Idem: 56.
100 This point of criticism may be equally relevant for the study of party organization. Yet see Andrew M. Appleton & Daniel S. Ward (1997) ‘Party Response to Environmental Change: A Model of Organizational Innovation’, Party Politics, 3: 341-62 for an interesting exception. A reason for the lack of consideration for innovation in electoral politics is, I believe, closely related to widespread acceptance in the scholarly community of the orthodox “saliency theory” of political competition. Indeed, PI as a party political strategy, assumes a different (i.e. more dynamic) understanding of how parties act in the electoral market than is implied by selective emphasis in saliency theory. I discuss these matters below and in more detail in “Reflections on Party Strategy, Entrepreneurship and Innovation”.
104 This lopsided view on the causes of change is characteristic for most studies of party – see, for example, Robert Harmel & Kenneth Janda (1994) ‘An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change’, Journal of Theoretical Politics, 6: 259-87. Indeed, students of party politics seem to have a morbid fascination with decline processes and the dynamics that follow in their wake. Success rarely features in accounts of party change, though the recent history of a party like the Austrian FPÖ suggests that positive results can be a powerful initiator of party transformation.
economic globalization, and, as such, neglects the more aggressive and perceptive components of innovation.  

William H. Riker’s work on political change, finally, is of interest too. He relies on firm economic motivations to explain the process of political change and attributes a decisive role to entrepreneurs and innovation therein:

"Leaders in voting bodies may be likened to entrepreneurs in a market. Entrepreneurs succeed by offering new products, and so it is with leaders. Of course, entrepreneurs often fail, offering products no one wants. So also with voting leaders: new alternatives, new issues, are like new products. Each one is sponsored as a test of the voting market, in the hope that the new alternative will render new issues salient, old issues irrelevant, and, above all, will be preferred by a majority to what went before. This is the art of politics: to find some alternative that beats the current winner. Such an alternative almost certainly exists, given disequilibrium. But given that the opponents of the current winner may agree on nothing but their opposition, it is difficult to find a way to put together a coalition that beats it. Yet politicians constantly do so."

Riker gives a clear indication of the strategic potential of innovation, yet his political leaders seem to be unconstrained by the organizational settings in which they operate. In European political landscapes however, parties, as organizational manifestations, set down parameters for action that are crucially important for the act of innovation.

**Toward a Theory of Programmatic Innovation**

The remainder of this paper elaborates PI in light of the question “Who does what, how, when, and why?”. I will start at the macro level, focusing on the relationship between party and environment and the function of PI therein. Next, I turn to the micro foundations and anchor PI in the motivations and actions of the party’s ambitious office seekers and holders. Special attention will be devoted to the position of PI vis-à-vis models of voting behavior. Then I will turn to the “internal party processes [concerning party programs] which to this day remain very much a blank spot in comparative analyses.” I propose a stage view of PI and introduce other actors of party therein. Finally, I hypothesize on the relationship between PI and various predictor variables.

**Party, Environment, and Programmatic Innovation**

Political parties operate in an environment. To start with and at a first level, there is the task environment of party which can be broadly defined as those aspects of the surrounding

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106 See below.  
109 Contrast with Herbert Kitschelt’s (1994) “reactionary” understanding of innovation.  
111 Though one should be careful not to bestow disproportionate degrees of constraining power upon party organization. In fact, a dynamic action-resource view of party in conjunction with principles of equifinality suggest that the constraints imposed by party organization are relative at best: actors that hold certain positions of power within the party can always rely on and mobilize alternative resources in support of their actions. I discuss these matters in a paper with the provisional title "Political Parties, Action and Resources: A New Theoretical Synthesis".  
112 The why element in this query justifies the term "theory".  
114 I examine the party-environment relationship in greater detail in "Political Parties, Action and Resources: A New Theoretical Synthesis".
circumstances that are relevant for goal-setting and goal-attainment. More particularly, it consists of those conditions external to the party that have an immediate impact upon the internal functioning: customers (the voting public), competitors (rival candidates and parties), and suppliers of labor and capital (e.g. collateral organizations). At a second level, there is the institutional environment which embodies the regulative features and structures, both formal and informal, that provide cues and guidelines for human interaction. For parties, institutional features may include the laws and customs governing the achievement of elective offices – what Joseph A. Schlesinger dubs the structure of political opportunities - but also the unwritten, tacit standard operating procedures that guide party action in legislatures. The second level institutional environment encircles the task level which, in turn, encompasses the party.

PI is a means of changing the party, whether as a response to changes in its environment, or as a preemptive action taken in order to influence the environment. A party’s electoral performance is a function of its ability to reach and maintain a dynamic equilibrium with its environment and the adoption of PIs means to contribute to the success of the adopting party. Since the party’s environment changes continuously over time, the party must adopt PIs to avoid sub-standard performance and secure its continuing existence. In more practical terms: new problems and solutions, either produced by rivals or random shocks and chance events, take shape in the party’s environment. The party must react to these changing circumstances (in order to maintain dynamic equilibrium with the environment) by introducing the new elements in its organizational setting. This is essentially what Herbert Kitschelt has in mind when he describes the programmatic adaptation process of European social democratic parties vis-à-vis the altering social and economic conditions posed by post-industrial society. However, a party may also try to establish a superior dynamic equilibrium with the environment by introducing its own new elements. The latter may be conceived as new solutions to old problems or new problems with attached solutions. This is the Rikerian process in which political entrepreneurs attempt to satisfy their ambitions by inserting new issues into the political market.

All this boils down to an open system view of party and environment: party is in continuing interaction with its environment and causal arrows move in both directions. Thus, party enacts the environment, yet is also affected by the surrounding realities.

Enter the Politicians

Who is the driving force behind these processes? I maintain the party’s ambitious office seekers and holders are: their ambitions for taking up elective office make them the instigators of PI. First, they have an interest in keeping the party programmatically up-to-date by inserting new environmental elements in the party - a party perceived as out of touch with recent changes in society would affect their chances for (re)election inversely. Second and

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120 Herbert Kitschelt (1994).
more fundamental, they will attempt to introduce new solutions and/or problems to the environment in order to win office.

Thus, PI involves two things: (1) inserting new environmental elements in the party and (2) inserting new elements in the environment. The potential of PI in the organizational setting of party is, moreover, considerable if one accepts that aspiring politicians may have different policy preferences within the bounds set by the party’s ideology.  

In other words, each of them will attempt to innovate in his/her own area of expertise and according to his/her own personal policy wishes.

The second understanding of PI finds an antecedent in the treatment of entrepreneurship in neo-Austrian as well as Schumpeterian economics. Israel M. Kirzner criticizes mainstream economics for its notion of individual choice as solely consisting of maximizing behavior. He maintains that human action is partly guided by maximizing criteria, but alertness, creativity, and judgement are equally, if not more, important. Hence he introduces an entrepreneur that is alert to the opportunities that exist already and are waiting to be discovered. Joseph A. Schumpeter in his theory of economic development, in turn, defines entrepreneurship as innovation: the introduction of a new combination of the factors of production that when combined with credit breaks into the static equilibrium of the circular flow of economic life and raises it to a new level. Then in regard to PI: politicians may skim the market for new solutions and problems that so far have gone by unnoticed – a Kirznerian process - or may introduce new solutions and problems ex nihilo – a Schumpeterian process.

The crucial point, however, is that both understandings of PI – (1) and (2) earlier - involve a situational view: actors make choices and decisions in settings open to the environment that are essentially opportunity structures changing over time.

What’s All the Fuzz About? PI vis-à-vis Models of Voting

But how, then, does PI relate to voting behavior? European political landscapes from the 1970s onwards have witnessed substantial transformations. The traditional structural ties between party and voter have withered, the electorate has by and large become increasingly volatile, and the significance of issues for political competition has grown. Against this background, and particularly with the advancement of political competition along issue lines in mind, PI as a political strategy offers some novel insights.

Ian Budge and his colleagues elaborate an issue ownership theory that stresses the role of selective issue emphasis. I find myself in agreement with the basic premises of Budge’s model: voters vote for parties they believe generate attention for their own issues; an issue is owned by a party when the public believes it stresses the issue; voters see differential issue capabilities of parties in various issue areas. However, a serious shortcoming of the

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124 Note, however, that there are fundamental differences between the entrepreneurship of Schumpeter and the neo-Austrian economics of Kirzner. A significant difference is the fact that for Schumpeter the entrepreneur is a disequilibrating force, while for Kirzner he represents an equilibrating force.
125 Israel M. Kirzner (1977).
orthodox saliency framework is its lack of a theory of change capable of explaining transition from one state to another. Thus Budge and his collaborators envisage an inherently stable ownership of issues in which parties only compete along those issue dimensions they feel they own – hence the notion “selective emphasis”. The corollary is a view of political competition as relatively “contained” with parties talking past each other.

Some scholars have tried to remedy the static view of classical saliency theory. Thus, Bonnie M. Meguid introduces the possibility of issue ownership transfer by hypothesizing that established parties may gain ownership of the issues of rival rising parties by adopting the issue positions of the rivals.\textsuperscript{130} Such a strategy will in the long term lead to a transfer of issue ownership, while more immediately the wasted vote theorem will curtail the wings of the challenger party.\textsuperscript{131} Her argument is interesting, yet neglects the bounds set by the ideology of established parties\textsuperscript{132} as well as the specific ideological nature and rhetoric of the rising party.\textsuperscript{133} Moreover, the copying of issues preceding the transfer of ownership as solely open to and beneficial for established political forces\textsuperscript{134}, represents too restrictive a view of political competition and party strategy.

John R. Petrocik\textsuperscript{135} and Hanne Marthe Narud & Henry Valen\textsuperscript{136}, in turn, approach issue ownership by differentiating between short term and long term ownership. Long term ownership resides in the different social bases of party support as well as in the link between social cleavages and political conflict. Thus, religious voters will support a denominational party because the latter is believed to represent the interests of the religious voter best. Short term ownership comes from the record of the incumbent party and especially its ability to handle current problems in the spheres of economics and international affairs. Incumbent parties will attempt to underscore the positive record, while the opposition will try to castigate the government for not doing its job properly. Good times (e.g. international peace, domestic economic prosperity, absence of severe inflation, etc.) provide the incumbent with a handling advantage, whereas bad times will provide the challenger party with a lease – a short term ownership of the “performance” issue under discussion.

The model of Petrocik and Narud & Valen, then, also clears the way for a transfer of issue ownership. Yet again, it is portrayed as incremental: the incumbency element features as a necessary intermediate variable in conjunction perhaps with unforeseen, random shocks to the system (e.g. outbreak of international financial crises). My contention is that transfer of issue ownership is unproblematic if one accepts PI understood as introducing new solutions and/or new problems with attached solutions to the market. For by inserting new elements, politicians may claim short term ownership of issues; while a record of continuing innovation

\textsuperscript{130} Bonnie M. Meguid (2000) ‘Stability in the Face of Change: The Strategic Role of Mainstream Political Parties in the Maintenance of Western European Political Landscapes’ Prepared for delivery at the 2000 Annual Meeting of the APSA, Marriott Wardman Park, August 31–September 3. Note, by the way, how her framework bears resemblance to my first interpretation of PI.

\textsuperscript{131} The wasted vote theorem maintains that a rational voter will prefer the copy with more electoral clout than the original with less.

\textsuperscript{132} Of course one could argue that ideologies are sufficiently ambiguous and amenable to the manipulation that is implied by imitative party behavior. However, see Melvin J. Hinich & Michael C. Munger (1994) Ideology and the Theory of Political Choice. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press for a view of ideology as an important constraint on behavior.

\textsuperscript{133} She neglects that her argument may be contingent upon the type of rising party under investigation. Thus, she convincingly shows how her model applies for green challenger parties and the established parties in France, Germany, and the UK. Yet, right-wing extremist parties, by their ideological and programmatic nature and rhetoric, pose a qualitatively different threat to established parties. As the recent electoral experience of European right-wing extremist parties indicates, traditional (rightist) parties continue to have significant problems with containing the growth of the extremist political neophytes.

\textsuperscript{134} This because of her adherence to the wasted vote theorem.


along a particular issue dimension may well lead to the transfer of the entire dimension in the long run. Why is this so?

A crucial intermediary between party and voter is the media. It is the latter institution that provides the electorate with cues and information about the stands taken by the various political forces, thereby presenting “images of ownership” to the voting public. Recent research suggests, however, that there is a critical disjunction between the news media agenda and the party agenda. 137 In other words, news agencies do not merely copy and transmit the party agenda, but instead function as independent actors that play their own ball game. It seems, moreover, that direction rather than magnitude of coverage is the critical factor for explaining voting behavior. 138 Thus whether or not the media portrays a party in a positive or negative fashion impacts upon the voting decision.

Taking these observations into consideration, PI reveals itself as an opportune political strategy. First, the media is more likely to take up the issue of the innovative party because of its mundane fascination with the mysteriousness that lies entailed in the act of innovation. Indeed, questions of newness never fail to feature in newspaper and television accounts. 139 Second, the subject of PI, i.e. a new solution to an old problem and/or a new problem with attached solution, is such that the media will most likely cast the innovator in a positive light. For the media is generally well disposed toward new solutions and equally welcomes unnoticed problems with attached solutions. 140

Two further remarks on the topic of PI and issue ownership: First, the potential of PI in the market of issues is substantial. 141 A spatial representation of a position issue like immigration reveals two sides: in favor or against. Thus a party could decide to innovate on either side: a new solution for curtailing immigration; or a new solution for opening up society to immigration. What, then, about valence issues? Brian Barry has convincingly shown that a valence issue like education can be cast in position terms: parties may differ on the means by which the end is to be pursued and the voter may have similar orientations. 142 Thus the same observations as for position issues apply. In fact, PI presents itself as a tool to bring about this transformation in issue quality.

Second and of vital importance, PI should also be understood in terms of conventional Schattschneiderian political competition 143 or Budgerian selective emphasis. 144 For Schattschneider and Budge et al. political competition is an incessant race in which parties try to make salient favorable cleavages and issues, and mute unfavorable political divisions and issue matters. Thus religious political forces will try to arouse the religious divide, since that would safeguard the net income of religious votes and avoid wakening the left-right divide because of its potential detrimental effect upon net electoral returns. PI can be regarded as a strategic tool to bring about such an outcome: innovation in religious matters may prompt the religious divide to surface and take first place in the mind of the voter. In short, PI is open to both issue ownership-maintainers and issue ownership-challengers. 145

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138 Idem.
139 This observation is based on my personal experience of watching television news and reading newspapers and magazines - scientific backup (or refutation) is welcomed.
140 It goes without saying that the content of the particular PI qualifies the above conjectures, i.e. content functions as an intermediate explanatory variable. For new solutions must be acceptable and attainable, just like new problems must be relevant and urgent.
141 Thanks to Henry Valen for this insight.
144 Ian Budge and Dennis Farlie (1983a and b).
145 This opens up the possibility of both forces offsetting each other. An interesting hypothetical idea that certainly asks further consideration and elaboration.
So far, I have discussed PI in relation to an interest-based model of voting behavior, i.e. saliency theory. However, PI also sheds light upon more symbolic models, like directional theory of issue voting and expressive models of voting behavior.

Directional theory is rooted in three core principles: (1) a dichotomous view of issues, (2) an explicit role for parties in stimulating differential evaluation criteria, and (3) the necessity for parties to be perceived as reasonable by the voting public or suffer diminished electoral returns, i.e. the notorious region of acceptability. In a directional world, parties win support at the ballot box by stimulating voter interest and attention via a clear presentation of their views and issue intensity. In other words, voters favor a party that is on their side of an issue and they favor a party that presents a strong case rather than a weak one. The notion of PI contributes to directional theory by employing the act of innovation as a means to generate intensity: PI unlocks a favorable emotional response from the voter or, put differently, newness as an affective trigger.

In addition, PI goes beyond standard directional theory. Like saliency theory, directional theory underscores that in multi-issue elections, candidates will try to be intense on issues that benefit them while evade issues that are potentially damaging. However, the previous discussion of PI in relation to a transfer of issue ownership has revealed that an ex ante restrictive view of competition and strategy may be wrong. A candidate with a “competitive” PI may well decide to compete along a “potentially damaging” issue dimension - especially so in a directional world consisting of emotions and affective ties between the mass public and elites.

The expressive understanding of voting behavior, in turn, hinges upon an idea of human behavior as institution dependent: market and political behavior are inherently different because the political arena spurs various kinds of ethical and ideological considerations that are suppressed in the market. For expressive theorists, electoral choice is not so much a choice between a and b as it is a choice between expressing a preference for a and a preference for b. It is the symbolic power of the policy rather than the cost and benefits the policy scatters on voters that is most relevant when it comes to voting decisions. In terms of policies, candidates will tend to present principles with which the voter is likely to sympathize – principles that express what the voter may like to become or that articulate how the elector may wish to see him/herself. For expressive theories, then, the contribution of PI is as a strategic means to stimulate sympathetic responses in voters: the candidate woos the voter by offering him/her the vital expressive ingredient of newness – and the expressive returns that follow in its wake.

Opening the "Black Box” through a Process View of PI

In what follows, I leave the cozy armchair of abstract theorizing and explore the internal party processes relevant to PI. My argument is inspired by innovation research an sich, yet its feasibility is grounded in several interviews I have had with prominent party personnel of Norwegian political parties.

(Figure 1 about here)


148 Idem.

149 More particular the secretaries of the program committee, international secretaries, and/or information secretaries of the socialist party (SV), labor party (AP), liberal party (Venstre), center party (SP), christian party (KrF), conservative party (Høyre), and progress party (FrP).
Figure 1 presents the process of PI in political parties. It depicts a life cycle of PIs starting from initiation over adoption and utilization to exnovation. The process view underscores the importance of differentiating analytically between the various stages: a specific PI may be initiated and adopted, yet may not be utilized by the party. In addition, it shows how PI is part of the regular programmatic process as it unfolds within party.

Some scholars have criticized the use of stage model approaches in the social sciences. Especially damaging is the critique of Hank C. Jenkins-Smith & Paul A. Sabatier. They maintain that stage models operate without a causal motor, i.e. they lack identifiable forces that drive the policy process from one stage to another. In addition, Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier assert that stage models do not provide clear empirical hypotheses.

Their critique is spot on for most of the process inspired analyses of innovation. However, it loses its bite if the researcher approaches the topic of innovation within a Colemanian analytical framework. First, the institutional rules of party in regard to program drafting push PIs from one stage to another. Second and most important, a focus on the purposive actions of the participants in party vis-à-vis the PI provides the essential drivers for advancement in the stages of process models. As for predictions, actor and structure interact to create a causal fabric either conducive or hostile to PI.

Let us first inspect the various stages in the process of PI. Initiation refers to the information gathering, conceptualizing, and planning for the adoption of the new program and PIs therein. In the programmatic realm of party this usually starts with establishing a program committee, a specific party structure appointed by the national council or national executive committee whose task is to organize the draft of the new platform. Its membership tends to be a representative sample of the party (geographically as well as in terms of positions) and involves individuals who are regarded as knowledgeable in matters of party ideology and policy. They meet occasionally (once every month) and the work is usually divided in subgroups with each group handling a particular programmatic area (e.g. international affairs, education, etc.).

In every party, the process is extremely open with the program committee inviting unaffiliated organizations (e.g. independent environmental groups) as well as knowledgeable academics to contribute to the program debate. Ordinary members, local, and county party organizations have a chance to voice their opinion too, either via electronic media or through regular channels. Some parties (e.g. the conservatives) go as far as organizing regional conferences with study groups devoting their time to specific programmatic areas. All this seems to suggest that the party is eager to know what is perceived as important within the own party ranks but also in society at large. In fact, the opening up to external organizations and individuals can be read as an explicit device meant to capture vital sentiments of public opinion.

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151 The basic tenants of the Colemanian analytical framework are: (1) the effects of systemic level phenomena upon orientations of individual actors, (2) the actions of individuals regarded as rational, and (3) the combination of these actions, in some institutional context, to bring about systemic outcomes. Also better known as the macro-micro-macro model. See James S. Coleman (1990).

152 Similar points have been raised by Nancy C. Roberts (1992). However she employs a functionalist template instead of an action perspective to tackle the Jenkins-Smith & Sabatiers critique, which is unfortunate. For functionalist perspectives abstractly assign to the system certain prerequisites and functions that inherently lack causal drivers. One needs to understand the functioning of organizational settings not from a functionalist perspective, but from the observation of the effective behavior of its members. See Michel Crozier & Erhard Friedberg (1980) Actors and Systems: The Politics of Collective Action. Chicago: University of Chicago Press for an elaboration of the latter view.

153 Alternatively, it could be a compensation mechanism for the lack of contribution and participation from the party's ordinary rank and file - thanks to Jo Saglie for pointing this out.
The various input find a translation in the draft of the program committee that is forwarded to local and county organizations (as well as posted on the party's webpages) and is eventually passed on (sometimes via the national executive committee) to the national council. Before treatment in the national council members may still send proposals for change. Taking the new proposals into consideration, the national council then draws up a new draft that will serve as a basis for discussion at the party convention. Finally, the national council sets a deadline for new proposals.

The initiation stage, then, is best understood with the aid of the evolutionary analogy: it provides variation in ideas. The multitude of actors, each with their own ambitions and motivations, bring forth programmatic variation which, in turn, provides the raw ingredients for the work of the program committee - in addition to the party’s ideology and previous platform.

The adoption phase unfolds at the party’s national convention. As the highest party body, it is the temporary organizational setting in which election programs are decided upon. Proposals for changes to the draft of the national council are numerous and pose a challenge to the organizing committee given the constraints of the convention's time frame. The many proposals to be dealt with again invoke the evolutionary template, though this time the job at hand is one of selection.

Helpful for understanding the decisions concerning party program and PI at the national convention is Coleman’s theory of collective decisions. Delegates face a sequence of programmatic choices (i.e. the various proposals) and can exchange partial control over issues that interest them little for a greater control of those that interest them more. Such a view also leads the researcher to examine potential strategic activities in which delegates engage to bring about favorable outcomes.

Utilization refers to the active use of the particular PI in the party’s campaign. It can be traced in the party’s press releases as well as candidates’ public statements (e.g. newspaper and television interviews of candidates). As I argued earlier, PI is meant to enhance the chances of politicians to attain office, so it is vitally important for them that the media takes up their innovative message. However, since the media has its own agenda, there will not be an automatic transformation from the candidate’s agenda to the media’s – the image here is one of the media as selector.

Exnovation, finally, ends the life cycle of PI: it is the removal of the PI from the party program. As such, it differs from discontinued use since the latter need not involve removal from the party program, but merely cessation of utilization.

What is the position of the ordinary member in the process of PI? The rank and file are the information providers and, consequently, play a vital role in the initiation phase. More particular, they provide the party’s politicians with information concerning new solutions and/or problems in which they personally have an interest. They may do this either via personal proposals, working via the local party organization, or contacting the local party candidate directly. Yet, as the innovation process advances, their role diminishes. In other words, the ordinary member is not antithetical to the politician as claimed by rational choice scholars. Instead, their interests meet at the initiation stage of the PI process.

Predictions

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155 A party’s campaign is considered to start after the national convention.
157 This has significant analytical repercussions since it turns the entrepreneurial function of innovation into a collective quality rather than individual.
In this final section I will tease out some predictor variables regarding the adoption and utilization phases of PI. It is important to underscore that the hypothesized relationships involve purposefully acting individuals within the institution of party, i.e. the party’s rules and resources set down the parameters for action. The focus will be on the second interpretation of PI: introducing new solutions or new problems with attached solutions to the market.

Earlier I noted how PI may serve two strategies: the maintaining of issue ownership (PIM) or the challenging of issue ownership (PIC). Each strategy is tailored toward specific voting groups. PIMs aim at the party’s core constituency, its electoral heartland: those groups among the voting public that feel attached to and identify with the party. For example, the core constituency of Christian democrats is the religious voter, while for labor parties the working classes serve as electoral heartland. PICs, on the other hand, are directed toward the voters that are “up for grabs” – the so-called battlefield – and/or the constituency of rival parties. Note how the political competition that is engendered by PICs is more dynamic than the competition assumed to take place in standard saliency theory (and its correctives) as well as directional theory – no ex ante restricted political competition exists in the PI framework.

With the decline of the traditional relationships between voter and party and the advent of issues and candidates, one would expect PIC to increase in importance. This is only in relative terms however, since a party cannot risk breaking the ties with its core constituency completely - after all, such a thing as “asset specificity” is no stranger to parties. Moreover, and as Ruud Koole & Philip Van Praag Jr. have convincingly argued, parties in multiparty systems employ various strategies at the same time in campaigns. Nonetheless, over time and with the 1950s and 1960s as a base period, one should see an increase in the use of PICs vis-à-vis PIMs.

Considerable explanatory leverage resides in the type of electoral system, party system, and the specific ideological and programmatic dynamics produced by the country’s cleavage structures. Thus, winner-take-all electoral systems should induce candidates to employ PICs more so than under proportional conditions: you either win or lose and why not try winning by entering the battlefield or stealing votes in the heartland of your opponent. Multiple issue dimensions, in turn, should increase the opportunity for PICs in absolute terms, hence the hypothesis: the incidence of PICs in nations with simple conflict structures is less than in states with complex issue patterns.

Such macro level predictions, however, leave untouched the internal processes related to PI. What then could determine the adoption and utilization of PIMs and PICs? Let us hypothesize further:

As for the adoption phase, parties will attempt to adopt both PIMs and PICs. Adopting PIMs is what one would expect parties to do (according to standard theories) so the focus here is on PICs relative to PIMs. Supreme explanatory powers should be attributed to PI-decision variables. For the adoption of a PI is unique to the evaluation of the particular PI within the particular party. Two variables stand out: complexity of the PI (i.e. the degree to which a PI is perceived as difficult to understand and use) and the perceived compatibility of the particular PI with the existing programmatic package. As for complexity, I predict a negative relationship with PI; for compatibility a positive association should maintain. The adoption of PICs also relates to the strategic activities that are organized by the innovator in support of PI. Three strategies present themselves to the individual who looks to innovate: searching for

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leadership support, building internal coalitions with likeminded politicians, and dispersing information in regard the PI. All three should correlate positively with PI.

What determines the utilization of PICs and PIMs? A first explanatory contender is at the level of the individual and especially the politician’s predispositions. It is the individual candidate who ultimately decides what strategy will be employed in the district. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita has shown how psychological attitudes of party leaders towards risk taking account for much of the variance in the political success of their parties. A similar relationship should maintain for PI. Both PIC and PIM involve risk taking, yet the amount of risk the individual bears is higher with a PIC strategy than for PIM: he/she risks losing his/her core constituency, the asset specificity of the party as an electoral vehicle, as well as the election if the opponent manages to capitalize on his/her PIs. Therefore, risk taking politicians should be more likely to engage PICs than risk averse candidates. In this regard, individual level attributes like the seniority of the candidate and his/her age could function as proxies for risk taking: senior and older candidates are less likely to utilize PICs than younger and junior candidates.

Finally, the utilization of PIs depends on the specific contextual circumstances the candidate faces in his/her electoral district. Especially the candidate’s chances of getting elected stand out. A remote district would induce PICs; a safe district PIMs; and a close district (50:50) a mix of both strategies.

The paramount objectives of this paper have been to provide the student of party politics with a taste of the innovation pudding and to lay the foundations for a theory of PI. As for the latter, PI clearly presents itself as an avenue of inquiry capable of shedding novel light in the realm of electoral politics. Surely, there have been many aspects of PI that have not been fleshed out in this essay. The specific effect of the institutional facet of environment upon party strategy clearly needs further elaboration. In addition, one may want to consider the exact association between performance levels and PI as well as between goal setting and attainment and PI. Therefore, let the paper be an invitation to others to more comprehensively research the dynamics of PI.

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Figure 1. A process view of programmatic innovation